Chapter 12
Pupil Selection and Enrolment in Comprehensive Schools in Urban Finland

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Abstract There is a pervasive myth that education policy for comprehensive schooling in Finland is non-selective, meaning that all children attend similar schools (peruskoulu) catering for the children who live nearby. Following from this is the idea that the Finnish education system must be relatively uniform and fair, since there is no obvious ability-grouping by tracks or streams for pupils under the age of 15. In this chapter we challenge these claims by analysing the ways in which public comprehensive schools select and track their pupils through different admission criteria for different teaching classes within schools. We argue that schools' selection of pupils and the enrolment policies of cities vary nationally in a way that raises questions about the opportunities of attending 'one school for all'. Our results indicate that selection processes for admission to emphasised teaching classes are fierce with schools not just evaluating pupil's aptitudes for certain subjects but applying numerous criteria when enrolling pupils to emphasised teaching. Ways of testing, and the means by which they include and exclude pupils, may include aspects which reproduce existing social and economic inequalities in comprehensive schools.

The Nordic idea of 'one school for all'[1] underlies the comprehensive school system that was built up in Finland from the 1970s. At that time the legislation abolished the previous arrangement of different tracks in lower secondary level (when students are aged 12–15) and municipalities became responsible for organising schooling. Until 1998 the municipalities were then obliged by law to divide their geographical area into catchment areas so as to allocate all pupils to comprehensive schools. From 1998

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municipalities were only obliged to allocate a school place to each pupil within the municipality, but not specific pupils to each school.[2] Nowadays the pupil composition of each comprehensive school is constructed on the basis of pupil enrolment policies and practices, and how they are regulated and conducted at both municipality and school level.

School websites in the biggest cities of Finland in recent years show a picture far from non-selection but rather a range of very detailed aptitude-tests for accessing emphasised teaching, which is organised for a separate group than the pupils being admitted to their geographically closest school. For example, in music in the capital city area:

> [The] Music aptitude test is organised for first graders [once they apply at the age of six] and 6th grade students [at the age of 12] at the time defined by the City of Helsinki. The dates and times of the tests is advertised in schools' websites. The aptitude test for first graders includes a group section and an individual section. The group section measures musical basic readiness. […] The individual section is about identifying musical readiness (basic beat, the sense of rhythm, repeating melody and singing). For the individual test [two well-known childrens'] songs should be practiced. In addition, it is possible to give a voluntary sample of playing or singing. The aptitude test for 6th graders includes a group section and individual section. The group section includes a musical test and theory test. The individual section includes a sample of singing and playing, which the applicant can choose for themselves. In addition, staying in pitch and musical interpretation are being assessed.[3]

Little of the discussion amongst education policy makers and the general public has recognised how some comprehensive schools select a significant share of their pupils in urban Finland. People have started to talk about 'entrance exams' to particular 'streams' in comprehensive schools due to their aptitude tests even if officially there should be only one uniform comprehensive school. Only where a school offers some "emphasised teaching in a particular subject" can a school legally use "aptitude tests" for admission to the particular emphasis.[4] There is no national policy that these selected pupils are intended to study all subjects in permanent study groups, but this seems to be what happens in practice. Journalists eagerly seek out information about the proportion of pupils that get selected to emphasised classes but the numbers are not easy to compare across cities and schools. In 2010 we compared selection to emphasised classes across four cities and this showed a variation in selected 12-year-olds of between 11 and 39%.[5] In public discussions the differentiation between schools is linked to reasons for choosing schools in Finnish cities and the relevance of those choices in Finland's supposedly non-segregated school system.

The policy change in pupil selection that emerged officially in 1998 legislation took place against a background of pupil selection to classes with a special emphasis had had already been occurring during the 1990s[6] and indeed, in the case of music classes since the early years of comprehensive schooling.[7] Over recent decades Finland's urban areas, especially the metropolitan capital area, have gone through tremendous changes in demographics, social structure, migration, and segregation of neighbourhoods. In the capital area the division of population between primary school catchment areas have seen significant segregation since the mid-1990s in terms of levels of education, income and speakers of languages other than Finnish

or Swedish. With parental choice policies also emerging, a worrying combination of both school and neighbourhood selection has become evident in segregated Finnish cities.[8] The significant pupil selection inside schools to classes with special emphasis interconnects with the trend towards urban and school segregation by increasing socio-economic differences between and within schools.[9]

In this chapter we draw a national picture of pupil selection by schools and enrolment policies for comprehensive schools by cities across Finland in early 2020. We argue that schools' selection of pupils and the enrolment policies of cities vary nationally in a way that raises questions about the opportunities of attending 'one school for all'. Our concern is both about differences between and within cities in Finland's comprehensive school system and about equal opportunities for all children to enrol in the emphasised classes. Drawing on previous Finnish literature on socio-economic stratification of the school market linked to pupil selection,[10] we also consider how pupil selection conducted by the schools together with the choices intended by the families from different social class backgrounds enable the social distinction of Finland's higher social classes through selective choices for their children within the public system.[11] Next we sum up how socio-economic status (SES) is related to pupil admission policies for comprehensive schools in urban Finland. Based on an analysis of the web pages of Finnish schools and cities, we then report on how pupil enrolment and selection took place in Finland's 12 biggest cities in the school year 2020–21.

The Needed Capitals of Families and Enrolment in Schools

The overall landscape of "options to choose" and perceived differences between schools and their enrolment practices, are viewed differently by families with dissimilar social, cultural and economic capital. In many countries where school choice policy has taken over, researchers have pointed out that once entrance to schools is organised as process of consumption it will maintain and produce social distinctions. This is because parents with a great range of relevant capitals can interpret the signs and messages and also have the confidence to challenge norms for their advantage.[12] When two of us interviewed parents in Finland in early 2010 about their process of school choice and images of schools, it was evident not only that the reputation of schools varied, but also the reputations of various classes within schools varied in terms of their expected academic demands and social composition. This was based on rumours among families as well as their perceptions of the process of selection against admission criteria.[13] Family surveys combined with statistics of pupil flows out of schools' catchment areas also showed how pupil selection connected to socio-economic differences. The most sought after and selective schools were favoured by higher educated families, particularly children of university educated mothers.[14]

In public discussion pupil enrolment based on testing pupils' aptitudes in particular emphasised subjects has been portrayed as a rather neutral, uncomplicated matter, particularly among policy-makers. However, in legislation the term 'aptitude

testing'[15] is used, and this often translates into entrance exams as a 2015 interview with the then Minister of Education and Culture Sanni Grahn-Laasonen illustrated:

> In my opinion, entrance examinations are acceptable, provided that the entrance admission criteria are clear and transparent and the possibility of applying for special emphasis classes is informed to everyone.[16]

As this statement shows the common belief is that if information of admission criteria is available openly to all in the internet, this makes the system fair and equitable. Yet Finnish research shows that the same 'pure' information does not reach families in the same way.[17] Interviews show that it is also a question of how school choice is made inside families. Highly educated parents tend to guide and support their child more, especially university educated mothers. They often choose a child's school or pre-select schools for their child to "choose" from. In less affluent families children are often left to make a choice of school more independently.[18]

Previous findings indicate that the application and selection processes undertaken by schools seems to cause socio-economically selective student compositions in classes with special emphasis,[19] and that this is the case even when students' achievement levels are analysed.[20] Aspects of the actual admission process are central to understanding this pattern: how the pupils get information about the entrance tests, how they enrol, and by what means success gets measured. Pupils with a background in institutionalised hobbies such as sports or music seem to get ahead when it comes to the entrance examinations of special emphasis classes that are highly selective. In the tests for lower secondary school, it is especially evident that some of the applicants may have played an instrument or some sport for almost a decade by the time of the testing. This means that their peers who are 'only' interested in the topic but have little experience would likely not achieve as well in the admission test/s, since skills in the subject matter are tested and competition may be fierce.[21] Skills in different subject areas are usually derived from extracurricular activities outside school hours and thereby strongly related to family resources, especially money. In this way success in admission testing for selective classes is also a question of economic inequalities, despite the official discourse of tuition-fee-free, public education.[22]

Ways of choosing leisure activities are known to be differentiated according to social class background in Finland as elsewhere.[23] The successfully selected and enrolled children would likely have relevant hobbies in any case. The real question is whether it is fair that the educational system selects pupils based on skills that are known to be connected to family socio-economic background. Resources become naturalised into "talent", even if it is actually the difference in the chosen hobbies and the embedded amounts of practice included in them which is differentiating children into separate classes within a school. The combination of knowing the ways in which to access entrance examinations,[24] the strategies of school choice families use[25] and the potential for schools' admission criteria to be unequal[26] are fairly thoroughly investigated themes in Finnish cities. It seems that in each phase of the admission process family resources seem to make a difference, and the process itself thereby seems to function to exclude those with less capital or with capital deemed less relevant in ways that are often hidden.

Recent studies also show differences between types of emphasis in relation to student composition: classes with language emphasis have students with the highest GPA and the most educated mothers, science and arts classes also had high-achieving pupils, whereas sports classes were most similar to classes without a special emphasis, but differed significantly from them regarding achievement in grade seven. So far, little research has been conducted on how the grouping might impact pupils studying in selected groups and the variation of those groups by subject emphasis. For example, recent research measuring group effects on pupils' control expectancies of success found that in language and arts classes, pupils' agency beliefs of abilities declined more than in other class types.[27]It would also be particularly significant to evaluate the effects of selection on pupils in neighbourhood-based groups as well as the effects of groupings on entire school communities. Recent findings indicate that the boundary-work conducted in schools between selected and non-selected classes happens along these lines of selection, when young people are taught in groups based on selective practices. Additionally, the grouping practices lead to the problem that "… organising emphasised teaching in separate school class groups, aligns the structurally produced inequalities of social class and racialisation with school class group boundaries".[28] This means that the election conducted in schools need to be intersectionally investigated, as it produces phenomena that relates to both social class and ethnicity in the everyday-life at schools. Gender has also been found to associate with the class type statistically so that the selective school classes with special emphasis attracts slightly more girls than boys. Gender differences has appeared particularly between emphasised subjects, for instance example Satu Koivuhovi and colleagues report that science classes attracted especially boys while art classes attracted more girls.[29]

Pupil Enrolment and Selection in 12 Biggest Cities of Finland

In this section we examine how pupil enrolment and selection are conducted in the 12 biggest cities in Finland in the school year 2020–21. The population of the cities, varying between 657,000 (Helsinki) and 76,000 (Joensuu),[30] accounted for 44% of the population of Finland in 2020. The proportion of families with children in comprehensive school age is most likely higher in cities compared to whole country that has low population density. In addition, comprehensive schools in these urban centres, especially some lower secondaries, serve small number of pupils who come from surrounding towns.

Policies to Allocate Pupils to Local Schools

Policies and practices varied between cities in terms of how they assigned a local school for each child and in what ways families could (try to) influence which school their child attended in each local system. In the most of the cities the schools had

their own district or geographically defined enrolment area for primaries and lower secondaries and then the place of residence usually determined a place in a particular school. However, in a few cases schools shared the same catchment area and then equalised numbers of pupils between schools. A few cities also announced that geographical boundaries of catchment areas could be changed annually if necessary to form pedagogically and economically appropriate teaching groups.

Significantly different enrolment policies were in use by some cities with large catchment areas (Espoo, Vantaa, Oulu, Jyväskylä) as the schemes included multiple school and employed various enrolment criteria other than proximity.[31] Under such enrolment policies that placed several schools in each catchment area parents could not guarantee a place for their child in their desired school by buying a house or an apartment in a particular area or renting a place to live in a particular neighbourhood. Rather enrolment was also influenced by other "choices" by pupils, especially those applying to emphasised teaching in some subject based on success in their entrance examination (discussed in the next section) and choice of a foreign language. Only some of the lower secondary schools provide long courses in certain foreign languages other than English, typically French, German, Spanish, Swedish or Russian. Choosing such a long language course during their primary schooling meant a child could not be enrolled in some lower secondary schools in the local area, as they did not provide those language courses in their curriculum. As a result, the choice of special emphasis, the choice of an exceptional (other than English) language in primary school, and especially the combination of these two proved socio-economically differentiating from the rest of the pupil population when it came to enrolling in schools.[32] Indeed in areas with large catchment areas with several schools many forms of capital of a family may be needed in order to influence enrolment possibilities.

Transfer from primary schools (6th grade) to lower secondary schools (7th grade) took place in most cities (7 out of 12) according to pathways intended to provide a continuum from a particular primary school to a particular lower secondary school. This policy of pathways did not necessarily depend on whether the municipality assigned the local school for a first grader according to a geographically defined enrolment area or large catchment area. Some comprehensive schools include grades 1–9 and the pupil does not change schools. Every pupil has also the right to apply for a school other than the assigned local school. These secondary applicants can be admitted only if there are places available in the school they are applying for. In addition, schools use various criteria when admitting pupils, which should however be equal according to the Basic Education Act.

Emphasised Teaching with Selection

The municipalities are entitled to construct selective classes for emphasised teaching and thus are entitled to apply pupil selection criteria.[33] This has resulted differing profiles of the provision of selective classes across the country. The descriptions

Music: As an art subject, music plays a key role in supporting a student`s emotional growth and creativity. Special music class teaching offers plenty of opportunities for collaboration and social interaction. Experiences gained in collaboration increase the sense of security and thus support the development of the student's positive self-perception. Awakening curiosity, playful activity and happy togetherness are prerequisites for the development of the student's creative musical thinking. The primary goal of music classes is not to educate the music professional, but people who enjoy music in a variety of ways.[34]

Sports: The goal of sports lower secondary (urheiluyläkoulu) is to enable a total of about 20 hours of exercise, training and sports per week in a planned cooperation between educational institutions, sports clubs and the sport academy. Of these total weekly hours, the schools provide for 10 hours of exercise and training within the school week in close cooperation with sports clubs and the Sport Academy of Turku Region.[35]

Bilingual teaching: The aim of bilingual education is to give a pupil fluent language skills in both languages used in the classroom. Studying in two languages develops the child's problem-solving skills, creative thinking and adaptability. The goals and content of teaching in bilingual education are the same as in regular basic education. In bilingual education, the languages of instruction are Finnish and a second language. In bilingual education, 25–50% of the teaching is in the target language, and the rest is in Finnish. Each school specifies the amount of the second language instruction in its curriculum. Bilingual education helps pupils develop a fluency in listening to, speaking, reading and writing an additional language, and creates general interest towards language learning. Like all basic education, it develops grade-appropriate skills in all subjects of the curriculum.[36]

Mathematic—natural science: Mathematical—natural science emphasised studies include research and study visits are planned and carried out during the studies. Natural science research with all its aspects will become familiar to everyone. Each grade has its own study entity and theme each year, which also includes one art and practical subject.[37]

Visual arts: The main aim of a visual-arts-class-student is to develop and strengthen one's own visual expression. The pupil is challenged to a dialogue between him- or herself and the world by observing, researching and experimenting together—with a picture, by making a picture and learning from pictures. The pupil is encouraged to look and try open-mindedly for new solutions, to polish up technical skills and to improve material knowledge. Making independent choices, acquisition and application of knowledge, learning concepts and self-evaluating are also important parts of the working process of visual arts.[38]

Swedish-language immersion: Language immersion class follows the general curriculum of school and the foreign language is both a tool for learning and its object. In the first grade, teaching is entirely in Swedish and pupils learn to read and write in Swedish first. However, pupils can use their native language until they have adequate readiness in the Swedish language. The teaching of native language begins at the second grade under the guidance of a teacher other than pupils' own. Swedish and Finnish-Swedish cultures are also introduced in Swedish-language immersion class.[39]

Fig. 12.1 Examples of descriptions of the most typically emphasised subjects

of the content of these different emphases seem somewhat shared across cities but the magnitude of selective classes differ across the 12 biggest cities. Figure 12.1 illustrates the most typical emphasised subjects (translations to English are by the authors).

Some of the emphases were provided country-wide. Music, partly due to the historical reasons noted earlier, seemed to be the most prominent and was provided in all cities. Sports was also an emphasised subject area (with slightly differing wordings) present in almost all cities (11/12), except in Vantaa which had no exams to enrol emphasised physics education. Bilingual teaching in English was also provided in almost all cities (11/12).[40] Apart from these three areas, there was variation between cities in what is provided and what subjects are used to select the pupils. Other relatively common emphases were in mathematics and natural science or solely mathematics (9 cities), visual arts (8 cities) and Swedish-language immersion (5 cities). Table 12.1 illustrates all emphasised subjects that applied an aptitude or entrance test to selective classes and the school grades in which those subjects were taught in each

city in 2021. In addition, the schools offered school-specific emphasised teaching for pupils in the school and mainly no entrance requirement was mentioned (not in the table).

The three most densely populated cities (Helsinki, Espoo and Tampere) provide the largest variation in selective classes (Table 12.1). The fourth biggest city Vantaa clearly differs from the others with fewer emphases provided. This can be interpreted as a matter of education policy applied in Vantaa based on political decision-making, or as a matter of relatively moderate level of urban segregation, which can be kept up in the socio-economic profiles of the schools by mainly enrolling pupils through local school allocation. Helsinki, Espoo and Turku are relatively more socially segregated as urban areas, and additionally apply a more selective patterns for school allocations through selecting pupils to emphasised classes: in a more segregated area the possibility of applying for selective classes may on the other hand provide space for less urban segregation, as the (middle-class) families may enrol their children at their local school and use the selective route in emphasised teaching, and thereby remain in the area.

Admission Criteria

As presented in earlier studies on parental interviews,[41] the ways in which selection in the admission process is handled embeds some social distinctions not only in finding means for a child to attend the aptitude tests, but also in succeeding in them. The ways in which the cities and the schools inform and test the candidates play a crucial role in (re)producing as well as in preventing inequalities. The majority of urban schools used aptitude tests and/or other admission requirements to enrol pupils into the classes with emphasised teaching. As we discuss in detail elsewhere[42] the admission criteria and the ways cities inform or describe them, express the characteristics required of the student and it is a signal to families about the "right" pupil who is suitable for emphasised teaching. In addition, the descriptions about emphasised teaching often underline the selected teaching group and its significance for teaching. In the following we describe the entrance criteria in the most common emphasis: music, sports, bilingual teaching in English, mathematics and natural science and visual arts in order to give an overview of the ways in which the public system selects (some) of its pupils and furthermore streams them to separate teaching groups for their entire time spent in comprehensive schools.

In music the aptitude tests were described as including various aspects in musical aptitude and skills. Most in the later music entrance examination (for children age 12–13) included singing (in 10 cities), playing an instrument (optional in 7 cities and in addition voluntary in 4 cities), an interview (in 7 cities), musicality test (in 6 cities) and repeating rhythm and/or melody (at least in 5 cities). With these tasks, different aspects of musicality, e.g., intonation, sense of melody and rhythm and musical interpretation, are evaluated. This was expressed in a requirement of 12-year-olds applying to the 7th grade in the city of Kuopio:

Table 12.1 The subject areas of emphasised teaching with admission criteria and their grade of instruction in 12 largest cities in Finland in 2021

	HE	ES	TA	VA	OU	TU	JY	LA	KU	PO	KO	JO
Music	1–9*	3–9*	3–9	3–9	3–6, 7–9	3–9	4–9	3–9	3–6, 7–9	3–9	3–9	7–9
Visual arts	3–9*	7–9	3–9		3–6, 7–9	3–9		6–9	3–6, 7–9	3–9		
Crafts								3–9				
Creative design			7–9									
Dance	3–6, 7–9	7–9							3–6, 7–9			
Dance and performing	7–9											
Drama												7–9
Expression/artistic expression	3–6, 7–9	7–9									7–9	
Circus art			7–9									
Physical education	3–9*	7–9			3–6, 7–9	3–6		3–9	3–6, 7–9	4–6, 7–9	3–6, 7–9	7–9
Sports	7–9	7–9	3–6, 7–9		7–9	7–9	7–9	7–9	7–9	7–9		
Sports and mathematics	7–9											
Home economics and physical education	7–9											
Mathematics—natural science	7–9	3–6, 7–9	7–9					3–9*	3–6, 7–9	7–9		7–9
Mathematics	7–9		7–9			3–9					7–9	
Nature and science	7–9											
Experimental science			7–9									
Science						7–9						
Technology	7–9	7–9	7–9									
Hitech											7–9	
Communication	7–9							7–9				

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

	HE	ES	TA	VA	OU	TU	JY	LA	KU	PO	KO	JO
Media	7–9		7–9								3–9	
Entrepreneur										7–9	7–9	
Latin	7–9		7–9									
Basic education in English/Bilingual Finnish—English	1–9*	1–9	1–9	1–9*	1–9	1–9	1–9	1–9	1–6, 7–9	1–9		1–9
Swedish language immersion	1–9	1–9		1–9		1–9		1–9				
Bilingual Finnish—Russian	1–9					1–9						
Bilingual Finnish—German/French			1–9			1–9						
Bilingual Finnish—Chinese/Spanish/Estonian	1–9											

HE = Helsinki, ES = Espoo, TA = Tampere, VA = Vantaa, OU = Oulu, TU = Turku, JY = Jyväskylä, LA = Lahti, KU = Kuopio, PO = Pori, KO = Kouvola, JO = Joensuu

1–9/3–9/4–9 = There is a continuum through comprehensive school and only new applicants take an aptitude test in the seventh grade for lower secondary

1–9*/3–9* = There is a continuum from primary to particularly lower secondary in some schools, but the emphasised subject is also provided in lower secondaries (grades 7–9) where an aptitude test is required

3–6/4–6, 7–9 = The applicant takes an aptitude test at both primary and lower secondary school

> The compulsory song evaluates specifically the singer's technique and among other things the aspects of intonation and rhythm perception (0–4 points). In the optional song, the more artistic side of the performance is evaluated e.g., phrasing and interpretation (0–4 points). The playing sample is performed unaccompanied or without backing tracks. In the playing sample, both the playing technique and artistic aspects are evaluated during the same sample. Other sections: extra-curricular activities (0–2 points), degrees in music (0–1 points), musicality test (0–2 points), interview (0–3 points).[43]

As this example shows, not only the "musicality test", but also an interview with a pupil and their previous achievements in the hobby were used in evaluating applicants to music classes. The interview was mentioned to be used as a tool in the selection in most of the cities in at least one of the classes with emphasised subject curriculum at the 7th grade. Overall, attached to 'aptitude tests' some schools evaluated previous grades in specific subjects and the written statement of the pupils' aptitudes by a previous teacher (both mentioned as criteria in four cities, and in five different emphasised subjects). There are several points in these tests that are technically testing skills learned from extra-curricular activities (e.g., mandatory or voluntary playing of an instrument), evaluating obtained degrees (from music institutes), and assessing by way of the interview social relations as well as cultural patterns obtained in extra-curricular activities that often cost money. Several of these are points at which having had extra-curricular activities in music prior to this aptitude-test will serve as a trump card in the event of tough competition. As an outcome testing 'aptitudes' that are in practice strongly connected to social and economic inequalities amongst children, the system legitimises these social class-related aspects. Such patterns of inequalities are operating within the public comprehensive school system, in which the role of economic inequalities is hidden as the system is public by nature and tuition-fee-free.

In sports or physical education there were three different ways to organise the emphasis and pupil selection in use: (i) so-called sport lower secondaries (urheiluyläkoulu) and sports classes (urheiluluokka) as a permanent study group in those schools that used a national aptitude test with basic selection and a sport-specific test for intake, (ii) schools with physical education emphasis and physical education class (liikuntaluokka) that used the basic section of the national aptitude test and no sport-specific test, and (iii) so-called physical education local schools (liikuntalähikoulu) that typically had no separate grouping for student nor aptitude tests. All 12 cities offered at least one of these formats of selection for sports in their schools. All three types were used in the City of Helsinki, and as a contrast the City of Vantaa run all as physical education local schools. Helsinki had also added another subject to sports, namely sports and mathematics and physical education and home economics.

To apply to sport classes or physical education class the applicant took a national aptitude test, which consists of seven evaluated sections: (1) mobility skills and speed, (2) perseverance, (3) strength, (4) balance and rhythm, (5) mobility, (6) skills to handle sport equipment and (7) optional school-specific section. If the seventh school-specific section was used, the weakest test sections 1–6 was ignored. This

seventh section was not in use in all schools and the content of it was not always explicitly available in the internet resources.

An actor involved in pupil selection to classes specialised in sports is the Finnish Olympic Committee as it has coordinated the national tests since 2017 and also defines the above three-tiered classification of selected sports classes. They aim at a model where "… the athletic pupil is training and preparing for the athlete's career, while at the same time acquiring the skills for the desired postgraduate studies so that both goals are achieved in the desired way".[44] In the Metropolitan area these activities were coordinated by the Metropolitan Area Sports Academy (Urhea) at grade 7–9 schools (a total of about fifty schools in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area in 2021) with a goal to "support the young athlete in combining scholastics and sports and growing up as an athlete".[45]

The aptitude tests for **bilingual teaching in English for Finnish speaking pupils** included several criteria. The bilingual classes typically started at 1st grade (age of 7), some in pre-schooling (age of 6) and previous bilingual daycare, but some also in the 7th grade (age of 13) or the classes could enrol additional pupils starting in the 7th grade (Table 12.1). The most used aspects in the 7th grade test were the oral skills in English (7 cities), English language test (6 cities), Finnish language test (6 cities), reading comprehension (5 cities), written skills in English (5 cities), interview (5 cities) and listening comprehension (4 cities). As an unexpected part of the test for bilingual teaching, there was a mathematical test (described as age-appropriate skills in mathematics) in three cities when admitting additional pupils to the bilingual classes. Table 12.2 provides an example of the aptitude test for 12-year-olds applying to bilingual English teaching (applying as additional pupils) where a minimum of 110 points of 140 points was required for the admission.

Mathematics and natural science or just mathematics (provided in 9 cities) aptitude tests for the 7th grade had little detail of what the tests included compared to other subject tests. Most often mentioned were a test of mathematical skills (6 cities) or of natural science or environmental studies (3 cities). There was no information of the content of the test in one city and little in another city, for instance "a written section measures the applicant's aptitude, competences and logical thinking in matters relevant to the [natural science] emphasis. In addition, pupil's motivation is clarified in an interview".[46] Extracurricular activities in mathematics as a leisure activity for children is scarce in Finland compared to hobbies in music, arts and sports.

In visual arts (provided in 8 cities) the most mentioned criteria in the 7th grade aptitude test were drawing or painting (7 cities), a shaping or designing task (3 cities) and pre-assignment (in 3 cities). The most mentioned specific targets evaluated were pupil's motivation (4 cities), creativity/originality/personality (4 cities) and/or motoric skills (for example eye-hand coordination, 3 cities). Points were also given based on previous school grades in art (2 cities) and some other city-specific criteria were mentioned for visual arts emphasised teaching. The following selection criteria in one school covered most of the typical aspects:

Table 12.2 An example of entrance criteria for bilingual teaching in English (7th Grade) in the city of Joensuu

Assignment	Aim	Subject of evaluation	Scores (total 140)
Reading a written text and answering questions related to the text in Finnish	To understand the key points of written text	Reading comprehension	20
Listening to the spoken text and answering related questions in Finnish	To understand the key points of spoken text	Listening comprehension	20
Filling the gaps in the text	Complete by inferring the missing words that fit the context in a structurally correct form	Vocabulary and structure management	20
Essay in English	Telling about yourself	Written communication: transmission of the message, vocabulary and structural diversity of the expression, handling of the matter in accordance with the instructions	30
Interview in English	To tell as diverse as possible about matters relating to oneself on the basis of the interviewer‘s questions	Oral language skills: fluency, communicativeness, extend of content, versatility of narration, pronunciation, correct language	20
Essay in Finnish	To produce clear and consistent writing in Finnish	Text structure; clarity of language, versatility and correctness, as well as compliance with the content	30

The entrance examination is twofold:

a) Instruction of the pre-assignment: Drew and colour/paint on A3 paper a work representational the story below. Feel free to interpret the story according to your own imagination: the final work can be either coloured drawing of painting. Read the story carefully: People, animals and nature, as well as different distances and light of the horizon, create their own mood in the picture. If you want, you can add other things. Use your imagination.

The story: An adult and a child are standing in the shade of the forest closest to you in the picture. They are looking together at the forest square where the horned moose is standing. The light of the horizon illuminates the landscape and shows a moose and variety of trees dark against the background. The child has also a pet; a big dog and rabbits that bounce in the grass.

> b) Exam organised at school (2 assignments): The criteria for the assessment of entrance examination are the same as the criteria of national curriculum (6th grade). At least a good grade (8) [of 10] is required for admission to the emphasis class. The entrance examination evaluates the pupil's 1) artistic- and 2) motor skills, 3) imagination and 4) creative thinking and 5) the ability to complete a given task within a given time.[47]

As this example shows, some selection criteria were very specific. When an entrance exam contains such detailed and diverse criteria, it can unnerve some applicants and create uncertainty about whether their skills are sufficient to even bother applying.

Conclusion: Mechanisms of Selection and the Myth of Uniformity in Comprehensive Schools

This investigation of the criteria used to select pupils to comprehensive schools in the 12 biggest cities of Finland in 2021 shows extensive pupil selection. The choices provided for families form selective routes inside officially non-selective comprehensive schools. The most common emphasised subject areas are music, sports and bilingual teaching, which all can be reached in almost every corner of urban Finland. The differences in the magnitude of the provision of selective routes varied across cities, which we interpret as being attached to local educational politics as well as the current levels of urban and school segregation: see Bernelius and Kosunen in this book.

It seems that admission to study in particular emphasised teaching groups in particular schools can be fiercely competitive and that selection is not just evaluating pupil's aptitudes for certain subjects, but much wider criteria. In the absence of national policies on pupil selection and how to organise emphasised teaching, the practices of selection and grouping by schools and municipalities not only vary as is visible in this data, but also contribute to the reformulation of the entire comprehensive schooling system by creating new social divisions within and between schools between pupils from different backgrounds (see Peltola and colleagues in this book).

When investigating more closely the criteria for selection, it is not only a technically challenging task for a child and family to find out the options and meet the criteria and aptitude-tests to attend selective classes in these cities, but there is a large question of equality of opportunity embedded in the selection of pupils. As we examined the admission criteria and the very details that are assessed in the aptitude-tests, it became clear that the ways of testing pupils may include aspects of reproducing existing social and economic inequalities. Some of the entrance criteria were narrow and exclusive such as presenting degrees derived from music-institutes, which would require having attended costly extra-curricular activities for years. Even if some of the formulations in the admission criteria seemed inclusive, one may reasonably question whether, for example an optional test in playing an instrument is really optional when there are far more candidates than may be admitted. Another issue is the pool of applicants: how many possible candidates self-exclude themselves even

from sending in the application if they perceive their chances of being admitted are remote? This pool of children who do not apply are difficult to capture in research. It is also clear from interviews with families that complicated and demanding admissions practices also construct imagined others who are the 'capable' pupils as opposed to the 'ordinary' or 'loser' pupils that some children consider themselves to be.[48] This all means we should question the numeric proportions of applicants versus admitted ratios, as they may not tell the whole story of selection.

Notes

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